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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BAGHDAD 002361

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 07/28/2018
TAGS: PGOV IR IIZ
SUBJECT: MAYSAN SHEIKH SKEPTICAL OF U.S. ASSISTANCE

Classified By: Acting Team Leader Dale Bedsole for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (U) This is a PRT Maysan reporting cable.

Summary

¶2. (C) In a candid hour-long discussion, prominent Maysani Sheikh Sa'adoon Bani al-Lami expressed frustration with the pace of assistance to Maysan, and told us that it was up to the U.S. to choose whether it is committed to Maysani reconstruction efforts. He identified clean water and electricity as the most pressing needs for his tribal area in northern Maysan. He said he was hopeful for the upcoming provincial elections, but fears that Sadrists-affiliated parties and candidates will create problems. He credited the tribes with helping to improve the security environment and was supportive of the tribal support council established in Maysan. Sa'adoon conveyed skepticism about U.S. promises of assistance, and said he would only be willing to continue engagements with us when he sees results. End Summary.

We Need Clean Water Projects and Electricity

¶3. (C) In a frank hour-long conversation with the acting PRT Team Leader, Poloff, and 2/7 BN officer at Camp Sparrowhawk on July 22, Sheikh Sa'adoon Gulam Abdul Kareem al-Lami expressed his frustration with the pace of reconstruction assistance and his doubts about the U.S. commitment to help Maysanis. He complained that after five years of Coalition presence, there had been no progress. Head of the influential Bani Lam tribe in the north, Sheikh Sa'adoon said he represented the "faces of the villagers," and that clean water and electricity were the two most pressing needs. He said that in his area in northern Maysan, they usually received two hours of power and seven hours off the grid. Acknowledging that many things have improved in other areas of Iraq, he bluntly asked us what is stopping the GOI and Coalition Forces (CF) from building a power plant in Maysan.

Elections Look Promising

¶4. (C) Sa'adoon told us that he is hopeful for the upcoming provincial elections, but has reservations about Sadr-affiliated parties and how they will behave. Although he did not know the Maysani Governorate Election Officer (GEO) personally, he said he had not heard any alleged improprieties or partisan behavior by the GEO.

Security

¶5. (C) Sa'adoon said that the security situation in the province continues to improve and credited the tribes for helping to keep order: "You see that nothing is happening here) that is us." He acknowledged there was continuing Iranian interference and smuggling, and blamed the Iraqi Border Police for failing to secure the border.

Tribal Support Council

¶6. (C) PolOff inquired of Sa'adoon's thoughts on the tribal support council. Sa'adoon said he was satisfied with the council, but added that there were tribes closely associated with certain political parties that "do not have Iraqi national interests at heart." He advocated that these tribes be removed from the council.

Doubts About Commitment to Reconstruction

¶7. (C) Sheikh Sa'adoon was one of the participants in the recent Joint Sunni-Shi'a Reconciliation International Visitors Leadership Program that traveled to the U.S. to meet with USG officials, including President Bush. When asked about the trip, he stated he had raised his concerns with the President, but was troubled that he had not seen any response. We reminded him that the security situation in Maysan precluded the PRT and CF from routine collaborative reconstruction and capacity-building activities, and that development assistance will take time and careful planning. We also reminded him that establishing project sustainability by Iraqis is a critical component of development assistance. Sa'adoon said he would be reluctant to meet with us again until he saw results. 2/7 BN officer explained that there are a number of projects already underway in and around the provincial capital Amarah, and that we are working to push projects out beyond Amarah into rural communities. Sa'adoon responded that he was the person through whom we should

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coordinate projects in his tribal area because "we have the companies and contractors to fulfill contracts," but was quick to express caution that it not appear that he was receiving preferential treatment over other Maysanis. Sa'adoon emphasized at the conclusion of our meeting that it is our choice whether the U.S. will fulfill its commitment to reconstruction efforts in Maysan.

Comment

¶8. (C) The uncertainty and suspicion expressed by Sa'adoon reflect common feelings among Maysanis due to previous experiences with the Coalition. The PRT and CF are working together closely to overcome these perceptions by prioritizing and coordinating assistance efforts to target the areas of greatest need. Some Maysani officials continue to exhibit anxiety about the impact of PRT/USG activities on the political balance; however, most engagements thus far with directors-general and civil society organizations have been positive, with contacts seeming receptive to our message of collaborative efforts to promote the welfare and well-being of Maysanis through sustainable economic capacity building efforts and private sector development initiatives.

End Comment.

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